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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001461

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/C, AF/SPG, LONDON AND PARIS FOR
AFRICAWATCHERS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DARFUR TALKS, DAY TWO AND THREE

REF: ABUJA 1456

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INTERNET OR INTRANET.

1. (SBU) Summary. Despite initial wrangling over agenda items and the presence of the international community during negotiating sessions, talks between the Sudanese Government and rebel movements started on August 24. The parties emerged from several closed-door sessions with an agenda to frame the discussions, but the rebel movements' objections to including the cantonment of troops on the agenda threatened the start of the discussions. Overnight, international observers were able to convince the rebel movements to drop their objections, and a United Nations Representative kicked-off the proceedings August 25 with a bleak presentation of the humanitarian situation in Darfur. Discussions recessed again to allow all parties to review a U.N. status report. International observers, concerned that the talks appear to have little direction, are working with the African Union team to formulate a more cohesive mediation strategy with defined goals and desired outcomes from the various sessions. End Summary.

REBELS INSIST ON PRESENCE OF INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS

2. (SBU) On August 24, the Sudanese Government, rebel movements and African Union emerged from three closed-door sessions with an agenda (reftel) for the discussions that includes humanitarian, security, political, and socio-economic issues. The rebel delegations insisted, much to Nigerian President Obasanjo's displeasure, that international observers (U.S., UK, EU) be allowed to participate in negotiation sessions. Obasanjo insisted Darfur is an African problem requiring an African solution, but AU delegation members accepted that the rebels would not drop their insistence on the presence of international observers, and that the international delegations were important in helping keep the rebels at the table. Eventually, the AU and Obasanjo relented and agreed to allow the international community to be present during the talks.

3. (SBU) The rebels also objected in the closed-door session to the inclusion of cantonment of troops on the agenda. Obasanjo over-ruled them and left cantonment on the agenda. As the talks opened later that evening, the rebels once again raised their objection. Several mediators attempted to convince the rebel movements that the cantonment issue was up for discussion and its inclusion on the agenda did not constitute their agreement to canton their fighters. AU Special Envoy Hamid Al-Gabid adjourned the discussion and requested that international observers persuade the rebels to drop their objections to the agenda.

4. (SBU) The U.S., UK, EU and Swedish delegates met with JEM and SLM/A representatives to discuss their concerns and advise them to move ahead with the agenda. Both movements admitted that they had made a tactical mistake, but they said they were under pressure from their field commanders not to concede anything on cantonment. Skittish from their experience at the Humanitarian Cease-Fire talks in Ndjamena in April, the rebels expressed their fear of being railroaded by African heads of states. We emphasized the importance of getting the talks focused on the situation on the ground and not procedural issues and pointed out the opportunities that the agenda offered to them. Both JEM and SLM/A listened to our advice and dropped their objections to move the talks forward.

5. (SBU) Talks resumed on August 25 as the rebels dropped their objections to the agenda. A humanitarian update from the United Nations kicked-off the session. Unfortunately, the representative was waiting for the report of the Joint Implementation Mission (JIM), which was expected later in the day. Nonetheless, the UN painted a bleak picture of the humanitarian situation and outlined the overwhelming needs yet to be met. The presentation emphasized the lack

of protection for civilians, sexual and gender-based violence, and involuntary return as key issues for UN partners. The Sudanese Government responded that they have documents, maps, and other information to be formally presented after they see the UN's JIM report. The meeting was adjourned until August 26 while all parties could review the JIM report and develop their response.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN THE MEDIATION TEAM

15. (SBU) In an effort to instill more confidence in the mediation team, we arranged for Ahmed Togod Lissan (JEM), Tagledin Niam (JEM), Dr. Sharif Harir (SLM/A), and Mini Minawi (SLM/A) to meet with Nigerian Special Envoy Abdulsalami Abubakar on Darfur. Abubakar is part of the mediation team and had traveled to IDP camps in Darfur in early July. Abubakar told the rebels to trust the mediators because their personal integrity is on the line. He also emphasized the importance of talking versus fighting and the strategic value in working through the agenda as presented. The rebel leaders expressed their reservations about the cantonment issue but assured Abubakar that they would continue with the items on the agenda. We are planning to arrange similar meetings to help familiarize the rebels with key members of the mediation team that will allow informal discussions away from the table.

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16. (SBU) We are also working with the African Union mediation team to help conceptualize the objectives of the talks. The sessions so far are unfocused and consist of each party presenting its position without any follow-up by the mediators to press the parties on key issues. We discussed this concern with the mediation team and are working together to define what is to be achieved and how the mediators, facilitators, and international observers can move both parties toward those goals.

17. (SBU) The talks are moving forward, albeit in procedural fits and starts. We expect the discussion of the humanitarian situation to continue on August 26. For now, the AU mediators and international community are working together to focus the direction of the discussions. Finally, we are working to convince rebel movements not to go ahead with their previously planned conference in Germany on August 28 and 29.

18. (U) Minimize Considered.
CAMPBELL